

# **‘The Germans are beating us at our own game’: American eugenics and the German sterilization law of 1933**

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**Abstract**

This article assesses interactions between American and German eugenicists in the interwar period. It shows the shifting importance and leading roles of German and American eugenicists: while interactions and exchanges between German and American eugenicists in the interwar period were important and significant, it remains difficult to establish direct American influence on Nazi legislation. German experts of race hygiene who advised the Nazi government in drafting the sterilization law were well informed about the experiences with similar laws in American states, most importantly in California and Virginia, but there is little evidence to suggest they depended on American knowledge and expertise to draft their own sterilization law. Rather, they adapted a body of thought that was transnational by nature: suggesting that the Nazis' racial policies can be traced back to American origins over-simplifies the historical record. Still, the 'American connection' of the German racial hygiene movement is a significant aspect of the general history of eugenics into which it needs to be integrated. The similarities in eugenic thinking and practice in the USA and Germany force us to re-evaluate the peculiarity of Nazi racial policies.

**Keywords**

eugenics, Nazi Germany, race hygiene, sterilization, transnational history

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In 1934 the superintendent of the Western State Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, Joseph S. DeJarnette, commented with a mixture of admiration and envy on the German sterilization law that had come into effect on 1 January the same year: 'The Germans are beating us at our own game' (DeJarnette, 1934, quoted in Kevles, 1995: 116; see Black, 2003: 279; Spiro, 2009: 364; Köhl, 1994: 37). DeJarnette was one of the sympathetic American observers of the implementation of a programme of 'race hygiene', or eugenics, in the Third Reich, some of whom even claimed credit for the German 'Law on the prevention of hereditarily diseased progeny' [*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*], which was passed on 14 July 1933 as one of the first measures of the new German government. To these American eugenicists, the German sterilization law could only be implemented so quickly because the Nazis were using American models as a blueprint.

While interactions and exchanges between German and American eugenicists in the interwar period were important and significant, however, it is difficult to establish direct American influence on Nazi legislation. German experts of race hygiene who advised the Nazi government in drafting the sterilization law were well informed about the experiences with similar laws in American states, most importantly in California and Virginia, but there is little evidence to suggest they depended on American knowledge and expertise to draft their own sterilization law. Rather, they adapted a body of thought that was transnational by nature: suggesting that the Nazis' racial policies can be traced back to American origins over-simplifies the historical record (see in particular Black, 2003; Crook, 2007: 227–47; Köhl, 1994, 2013; Spiro, 2009: 355–83). Still, the 'American connection' of the German racial hygiene movement is a significant aspect of the general history of eugenics into which it needs to be integrated. The similarities in eugenic thinking and practice in the USA and Germany force us to re-evaluate the peculiarity of Nazi racial policies: historians of the Third Reich often draw a straight line from racial hygiene to the euthanasia programme of the Nazis and thence to the genocide of the Jews, Sinti and Roma during the Second World War. German race hygiene is thus presented as the first step of the implementation of a 'biopolitical' programme that culminated in the Holocaust. The relationship between American and German eugenicists, however, cannot be explained within this narrative which assumes the essential 'otherness' of Nazi ideology and practice<sup>1</sup> (Bock, 1986; Schmuhl, 1992; Proctor, 1988; Burleigh and Wippermann, 1991: 136–97; Weiss, 2010: 282–3).<sup>2</sup>

Before 1945, the ideological spectrum within the eugenics movement stretched from the far left to the far right (Adams, 1990; Bashford and Levine, 2010; Graham, 1977: 1148; Paul, 1984; Freedman, 1979; Schwartz, 1995). Within this spectrum, American mainline eugenicists and German adherents of 'race hygiene' shared a basic outlook that made their cooperation possible. They supported the ideals of the 'Nordic movement', believed in the superiority of the 'white race' and saw eugenics as a means of securing its survival. They thus tied eugenics closely with the notion of 'race' and became natural allies in their quest for a eugenic utopia. To achieve their aims, they tirelessly lobbied for the introduction of eugenic policies, both 'negative' eugenic measures such as marriage bans and enforced sterilization, and 'positive' eugenic measures such as marriage counselling and tax incentives to increase the reproduction of the hereditarily 'healthy' parts of the population. The ultimate goal was to engineer the

make-up of whole populations by improving their physical and mental health. Even in the heyday of the eugenics movement during the interwar period, these positions were contested and had to be defended against an array of critics, ranging through socialist eugenicists, Roman Catholics, geneticists and anthropologists. The close cooperation between radical American and German eugenicists, who formed a well-functioning transatlantic network and were able to dominate the international organizations of the eugenics movement, served a purpose in the debates about the kind of eugenics that would be followed: it was meant to strengthen the position of radical, 'mainline' eugenicists.

During the interwar period, the focus of this German–American network shifted according to the changing political circumstances. In the 1920s, American support, both intellectual and material, helped to re-establish the German position within the international movement for eugenics that had been lost during and after the First World War, as will be shown in the first part of this article. During this time, the American example was praised as a model by German academics and politicians alike, and used to advertise the case for introducing wide-ranging eugenic measures. After the Nazi takeover of power and the almost immediate introduction of a law of forced sterilization, alongside other eugenic measures, American mainline eugenicists became outspoken supporters of Nazi race hygiene in an effort to justify and hold on to their own eugenical programme, which by then had increasingly become under attack, both for scientific and political reasons. As a practical and successful example, the Nazi programme of racial hygiene seemed to offer a lifeline to American eugenics. Ultimately, however, it increased the plausibility of their critics' arguments, because race hygiene became tied to the genocidal policies of the Nazis. Based on original American and German publications on eugenics, including the foremost periodicals such as *Eugenical News* and the *Journal of Heredity*, this article provides a reinterpretation of the transatlantic dynamics in the field of eugenics during the interwar period.

From their inception, eugenic theories had been conceptualized on a global scale. The aims of eugenicists transcended not only the borders between academic research, social policy and public health, but also those between nations and states. Their proponents stressed the importance of international cooperation between eugenics organizations for achieving far-reaching social and political aims. The eugenics movement was indeed a transnational phenomenon: almost simultaneously, societies and associations for the promotion and study of eugenics were established in the industrialized nations in the early 20th century, with the United Kingdom, Germany, the USA, France and the Scandinavian countries at the forefront. By the 1920s, the eugenics movement had become a truly global phenomenon and was institutionalized in Australia, the Soviet Union, China, India, Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania (Soloway, 1995; Stone, 2002; Thomson, 1998; Overy, 2009: 93–135; Haller, 1963; Kevles, 1995; Ludmerer, 1972; Weindling, 1989; Weingart *et al.*, 1988; Proctor, 1988; Schneider, 1990; Broberg and Roll-Hansen, 1996; Dikötter, 1998; Stepan, 1991; Bucur, 2002; Turda and Weindling, 2007; Wyndham, 2003). Eugenics thus constituted 'a fundamental aspect of some of the most important cultural and social movements of the twentieth century, intimately linked to ideologies of "race", nation, and sex, inextricably meshed with population control, social hygiene, state hospitals and the welfare

state' (Dikötter, 1997: 467; see Nye, 1993). The First World War interrupted the international cooperation of eugenicists, which had been established at an international conference in London in 1912, only briefly. In 1921, the second international congress of eugenics was held in New York, but German academics were not able to participate due to the exclusion of German nationals from international conferences after the war. In addition, because of the Treaty of Versailles and the occupation of the Ruhr area in 1923, in the immediate postwar period leading German eugenicists such as Fritz Lenz and Ernst Rüdin refused to take part in conferences where French delegates were present (*Scientific Papers*, 1923; Köhl, 2013: 44–5; Black, 2003: 268–9; Glass, 1981: 362). Behind the scenes, however, the German champions of racial hygiene worked hard for their reintegration into the international community. To this end, they used their good personal relations with American colleagues. Fritz Lenz, for instance, who in 1923 became the first German professor for racial hygiene at the University of Munich, was in close contact with Charles B. Davenport and Harry H. Laughlin of the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, as well as with Paul Popenoe of the Human Betterment Foundation, a leading representative of the eugenics movement in California. The psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin and the anthropologist Eugen Fischer, both leading figures of German eugenics, had been in correspondence with Davenport since before the First World War, and they all used this relationship to improve the international standing of German racial hygiene in the interwar period (Black, 2003: 258, 270–2; Köhl, 1994: 18–20; Proctor, 1988: 46–63; Rissom, 1983).

Based on these personal affiliations and helped by the thaw in international relations after the Ruhr crisis in 1923, German academics soon assumed leading positions within the international eugenics movement. In 1925, the Permanent International Eugenics Commission was renamed the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations (IFEEO), and Eugen Fischer, who would become the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Berlin-Dahlem in 1927, was one of the founding members of this association. The IFEEO became an important tool for eugenicists and 'bound together their scientific interests in internationally organized research on race with political propaganda for the distinctiveness of the "white race"' (Köhl, 2013: 52; Schmuhl, 2005: 151). Its members argued incessantly against the 'mixing of races', which was deemed to be detrimental as such, and needed to be prevented by eugenic measures. From 1927 to 1933, the IFEEO was headed by Davenport; its German members were Fischer, Alfred Ploetz, the 'founding father' of German race hygiene who had introduced the very term, and Rüdin, who followed Davenport as chairman in 1933. The 1928 conference of the IFEEO, held in Munich, completed the rapid reintegration of the German eugenicists into international structures. During the meeting, the international delegates visited Ploetz's private laboratory in Herrsching on the Ammersee as well as Rüdin's Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry, which had profited substantially from American subsidies (Weiss, 1990: 36). With the help of their American friends and colleagues within the IFEEO, German eugenicists had thus managed to assume a leading role in the international eugenics movements only 10 years after the end of the First World War (Köhl, 2013: 52–63).

One of the main services the national eugenic organizations offered to their members was to provide information about eugenic research, legislation, conferences and lectures

abroad. The standard works of the eugenic movement were translated into all major languages and regularly reviewed in specialist journals. International conferences allowed for personal exchanges with colleagues working abroad. A high level of information on recent developments in the field of eugenics on both sides of the Atlantic was thus maintained during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, the particularly intensive cooperation between German and American eugenicists was based on the shared socio-political and ideological beliefs as well as on a long tradition of knowledge-transfer between the two countries. American ideas and American practices had helped the formulation of eugenic theories in Germany from early on. Before the First World War, the USA had assumed a leading role in implementing eugenic policies – in 1907, the state of Indiana had introduced legislation that allowed for enforced sterilization on eugenic grounds, and by 1913, 11 other American states had followed. Thanks to the efforts of translators and intermediaries such as Géza von Hoffmann, a diplomat of the Habsburg Empire and convinced supporter of eugenics, the German public could stay abreast of developments in the USA (Von Hoffmann, 1913; Von Hoffmann, 1914: 435–6; Weindling, 1989: 150, 240; Weindling, 1985: 308; Weingart *et al.*, 1988: 286–8). In turn, the main German textbook on human heredity, co-authored by Ernst Baur, Eugen Fischer and Fritz Lenz, was reviewed favourably in American journals even before an English translation of this ‘valuable work’ was made available in 1931 (Baur *et al.*, 1931; Holmes, 1931). Paul Popenoe regularly reviewed German literature on eugenics and related topics for the *Journal of Heredity*, including the writings of Hans F. K. Günther, a literary scholar turned racial theorist whose popular typology of European races made him the darling of the Nazis and earned him a chair at the University of Berlin (Popenoe, 1931). Readers of *Eugenical News* were equally well informed about German publications on racial hygiene. Encouraged by Lenz, Harry H. Laughlin, certainly the most radical of the American eugenicists, published a German translation of his studies on the sterilization laws in the USA in the *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, the main German journal of racial hygiene. Ezra S. Gosney and Paul Popenoe had their study of the experiences with the Californian law on sterilization translated into German, and German studies on eugenic sterilization had made ample use of the American example even before the publication of this book in German (Laughlin, 1929; Gosney and Popenoe, 1930; Gaupp, 1925; Kankeleit, 1929).

In addition to the exchange of knowledge and information between eugenicists in the USA and Germany, large American charitable organizations contributed significantly to the transnational cooperation in the field of eugenics and public health by sponsoring institutions, organizations and individual research projects outside the USA. In America, the Eugenics Record Office on Long Island, which had become one of the most important institutions of the American eugenics movement under the leadership of Davenport and Laughlin, profited from lavish funding by the Harriman, Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations. Between 1910 and 1940, it received a total of \$1.2 m, which made the institute’s research, publications and lobbying activities possible. British, French, Romanian and German organizations and institutions also received generous funding from American charities; some of these, indeed, owed their very existence to American money (Bucur, 2002: 60–2; Bucur, 1995; Schneider, 1982). The Rockefeller Foundation in particular provided funds to eugenicists outside the USA; in Germany Hermann Poll,

himself a eugenicist and geneticist, coordinated its activities (Schneider, 2002; Kay, 1993). Already in the early 1920s the foundation had sponsored individual research of the geneticist Agnes Bluhm, the social hygienist Alfred Grotjahn and the geneticist Hans Nachtsheim (Kühl, 1994: 20; Weindling, 1985: 309). The German Research Institute for Psychiatry in Munich owed its promotion to the status of a Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in 1924 to a grant from Rockefeller; under the directorship of Ernst Rüdin it became one of the centres of eugenic research in Germany. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics, founded in Berlin in 1927, also profited significantly from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1929 it won a grant for a large-scale research project on the 'German Racial Structure' [*Deutsche Rassenkunde*]; from 1930 to 1934 it received annual payments of \$25,000, which helped to keep the institution afloat during the economic crisis and secured its survival. Othmar Freiherr von Verschuer's studies on twins, which he conducted at the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin, were co-sponsored by the Prussian Ministry of Public Welfare and the Rockefeller Foundation (Schmuhl, 2005: 118; Weindling, 1985: 314).

Thus, well informed about developments within the American eugenics movement, German race hygienists admired the USA for its racial and population policies, in particular the Johnson-Reed Act on immigration of 1924, which replaced the Emergency Quota Act of 1921. The law restricted the number of immigrants to the USA from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who had been living in the USA in 1890, according to the census of that year. Immigration from Asia was completely outlawed. The law was the product of a peculiar alliance between trade unionists who wanted to protect the American labour market from cheap competition, mainly from eastern and southern Europe, and eugenicists seeking to preserve the 'Nordic' character of the American people. Harry H. Laughlin, who had served as the 'Eugenics Expert Agent' advising the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, thus played a pivotal role in introducing a quota system for immigration that was heavily biased towards the 'Germanic' nations (Black, 2003: 188–205; Higham, 1955: 308–24; Wilson, 2002: 62–4; Zolberg, 2006: 258–64). In Germany, next to American sterilization laws, the Johnson-Reed Act was seen as a role model that showed the USA as leading the world in the implementation of eugenic policies. Leading National Socialists were equally enthralled by the American approach: Adolf Hitler declared that the American immigration laws proved that the USA was developing an active racial policy that denied entrance to the country to 'medically bad elements'. America, he claimed, was developing a view that was 'integral to the *völkisch* concept of the state' (Hitler, 1941: 490; Junker, 1997; Gassert, 1997). Before 1933, then, American eugenics was well respected in Germany; not so much for specific ideas or theories, but for the fact that in the USA eugenic legislation, including sterilization laws, had indeed been introduced.

The takeover of power by the National Socialists in 1933 marked an important turning point for German eugenicists and their American colleagues and allies, but by no means brought their cooperation to an end. While until 1933 eugenicists in Germany had admired the USA for its leading role in implementing eugenic policies, attention was now increasingly drawn towards the programme of racial hygiene that the Nazi state was introducing. Unsurprisingly, most German eugenicists welcomed the Nazi takeover of power enthusiastically; they now profited from generous funding from the state and

gained access, at least until the mid-1930s, to the highest levels of decision-making in the Third Reich. For eugenicists in the USA, on the other hand, the German example became an important argument in their struggle against critics who accused them of abusing the concept of eugenics to promote racism. By the early 1930s, when eugenics was elevated to the status of official state doctrine in Nazi Germany, the basic assumptions of eugenics and scientific racism increasingly became criticized in the USA. Geneticists had raised serious doubts about the simple application of Mendelian laws to human heredity, and the racist foundations of eugenics became the target of political criticism (Spiro, 2009: 331–9; Barkan, 1992: 297–310). Hence the ‘American–German partnership’ in the field of eugenics did not become obsolete in 1933, as Edwin Black has argued, but changed its focus and function. The tables were turned, and the National Socialist state in Germany now became the pace-maker of radical eugenical measures. American eugenicists became observers and admirers of the German race hygiene project, and their attitude towards German policies was a deciding factor in the debate about the kind of eugenics that was to be promoted. At the same time, however, the opponents of radical eugenics used the example of Nazi Germany as further proof of the justice of their cause, and the radicalization of racial policies during the Third Reich strengthened their position (Black, 2003: 300; Kühl, 1994: 27–8, 37–48).

Similar to other areas of policy-making, such as the building of Germany’s highways or the introduction of labour services (Zeller, 2007; Patel, 2005), in the case of the sterilization law the Nazi regime implemented policies that had been conceived and prepared during the last years of the Weimar Republic in response to the economic crisis. The Nazi Government drew on the expertise of the Prussian State Council for Public Health, which had consulted Germany’s leading race hygienists in 1932 and produced a draft version of a sterilization law. According to Marie E. Kopp, an American sociologist who in 1936 published a detailed report on the German practice of sterilization in the *American Sociological Review*, based on interviews with hospital directors, physicians, psychiatrists and judges, the ‘leaders of the German sterilization movement’ had repeatedly affirmed that the German law had been possible only because of their intimate knowledge of the Californian legislation (Kopp, 1936: 763). The physician in charge, Heinz Kürten, proclaimed in an article in the *New York Times* that the German law was modelled after legislation in the United States, following ‘the American pathfinders Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard’ (*New York Times*, 2 August 1933, quoted in Spiro, 2009: 362). These remarks seem to have been intended to please an American audience, however. In their introduction to the official commentary on the sterilization law, its authors Arthur Gütt, Ernst Rüdin and Falk Ruttke only briefly and rather critically mentioned American sterilization laws: to them, American practice was incoherent and ineffective, since, they claimed, in most cases only inmates of psychiatric hospitals could be sterilized, which made positive results for the whole of society doubtful (Gütt *et al.*, 1934: 53).

The German academic experts on sterilization might have used their knowledge of American sterilization laws, especially the Californian example which had been described in detail by Gosney and Popenoe. The list of hereditary diseases that was included in the ‘Law on the prevention of hereditarily diseased progeny’ resembled that of Laughlin’s ‘Model Sterilization Law’, a blueprint that he recommended for adoption

in American states (Laughlin, 1922: 445–52; Black, 2003: 113; Kühl, 1994: 38, 42–5). More importantly, the German experts could learn from the problems and pitfalls their American colleagues had encountered with the introduction and implementation of eugenic legislation. A number of sterilization laws had been vetoed by state governors or, until the landmark Supreme Court decision *Buck v. Bell* of 1927, which had upheld the Virginia sterilization law, had been declared unconstitutional. In addition, in a number of American states the existing sterilization laws had never been enforced. Thus, the German eugenics experts profited as much from their knowledge of the advances as from the failures of the American example.

The German law of 1933 was more radical than any of its American predecessors, but only since it introduced for the first time enforced sterilization on a national level, which had long been one of the central demands of radical eugenicists. The first paragraph of the statute prescribed that a hereditarily diseased person could be sterilized by a surgeon if ‘following the experience of medical science, it may be expected with great probability that their offspring may suffer severe physical or mental hereditary impairment’. The law listed ‘inborn feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, circular insanity, hereditary epilepsy, Huntington’s chorea, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, and severe physical deformity’ as reasons for enforced sterilizations. In addition, ‘severe alcoholism’ could lead to sterilization. The proposal to perform the sterilization of an individual could be made voluntarily by the diseased themselves, by medical doctors, by the directors of hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatric clinics and prisons, as well as by their legal guardians if the patients were themselves legally incapable of making decisions. The decision whether to sterilize a person lay with ‘Hereditary Health Courts’ [*Erbgesundheitsgerichte*], which were to be established at the level of local courts and included an eugenics expert on their panel; against their decision, the plaintiff could appeal once to a ‘Higher Hereditary Health Court’ [*Erbobergesundheitsgericht*]. These specialized courts were a genuine German element of the legislation; Laughlin had argued for the introduction of a State Eugenics Board that would give expert advice to regular courts. The most radical aspect of the law, compared with earlier German proposals, but in accordance with American practice, lay in respect of paragraph 12 of the law which allowed that the decision of a court to sterilize a person might be taken against the person’s will and, if necessary, by force (Gütt *et al.*, 1934: 56–9; Bock, 1986; Schmuhl, 1992; Noakes, 1984; Klautke, 2004). The German law, then, was not simply an adaptation of existing American laws, but a succinct summary of the demands of radical eugenicists compatible with the demands of the German system of law.

Still, *Eugenical News*, the most important specialist journal on eugenics in the USA and the official organ of the Galton Society, the International Federation of Eugenics Organisation and the Third International Congress of Eugenics, claimed credit for the German law, assuring its readers that the text of the statute read ‘almost like the “American model sterilization law”’. An unsigned editorial that introduced an English translation of the German text, most probably authored by the then editor of the journal, Laughlin, enthusiastically welcomed the announcement of the German law (‘Eugenical Sterilization in Germany’, 1933: 89–93). The Nazi government, *Eugenical News* proclaimed, was leading:



... the great nations of the world in the recognition of the biological foundations of national character. It is probable that the sterilization statutes of the several American states and the national sterilization statute of Germany will, in legal history, constitute a milestone which marks the control by the most advanced nations of the world of a major aspect of controlling human reproduction, comparable in importance only with the states' legal control of marriage. ('Eugenical Sterilization in Germany', 1933: 90; see also Kühn, 1994: 47; Tucker, 2002: 46)

*Eugenical News* became the most outspoken supporter of Nazi eugenics in the USA and turned itself into a mouthpiece of the new regime in Germany. Its board of editors was comprised of American mainline eugenicists who had, since the early 1920s, cooperated with German race hygienists both formally and informally, and now used the example of Nazi Germany to advertise their own convictions. Even the subtitle in the masthead of the journal showed sympathy towards German eugenics by using the term 'racial hygiene' ('Current Record of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene'), which was usually avoided in the USA because of possible misunderstandings.<sup>3</sup> The journal reported regularly on developments in Nazi Germany in a matter-of-fact way, with a focus on the practice of sterilization, and reviewed Nazi literature on racial policies favourably (Review of M. Staemmler, *Rassenpflege im völkischen Staat*, 1933; 'New Etymology for Eugenics', 1934). In 1934, it reprinted an address by the German Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, to the Expert Council for Population and Race Policies in Berlin, which explained and justified the sterilization law in the larger context of population policies of the Nazi government. The journal additionally published a leaflet issued by the *Völkischer Pressedienst*, an official news agency of the new regime, made its readers familiar with particular terms of German racial studies such as *Rassenpflege*, *Erbbiologie* and *Rassenhygiene*, and explained further eugenic measures, which accompanied the sterilization law such as state loans to married couples ('Eugenical Propaganda in Germany', 1934; 'German Population and Race Politics', 1934; 'New Etymology for Eugenics', 1934; Thomalla, 1934; Kopp, 1936; Czarnowski, 1991).

Equally supportive comments on the Nazi sterilization law emanated from California, the centre of the American eugenics movement on the west coast. Paul Popenoe of the Human Betterment Foundation, a tireless promoter of eugenic sterilization and marriage counselling, commented in detail on the German law in the *Journal of Heredity* (Ladd-Taylor, 2001; Stern, 2005: 82–114). He stressed that even though the law had been prepared over many years of discussion and was hence 'no hasty improvisation by the Nazis', it was in full accordance with Hitler's own views. According to Popenoe, *Mein Kampf* bore the fruits of Hitler's reading of the *Baur-Fischer-Lenz*, the standard textbook that represented 'the best-known statement of eugenics in the German language'. Projecting his own views onto the German dictator, Popenoe claimed that Hitler had recognized that 'negative measures are not enough to safeguard the racial values of a people' but needed to be accompanied by the 'encouragement of sound parenthood'. According to Popenoe, the German law was 'well drawn' and could be 'considered better than the sterilization laws of most American states'. By implementing the law with the aid of Germany's leading eugenicists, he expected the Nazis 'to be avoiding the misplaced emphasis of their earlier pronouncements on the question of

race'. They had thus 'given the first example in modern times of an administration based frankly and determinedly on the principles of eugenics' (Popenoe, 1934a: 257, 260; see Popenoe, 1934b; Cook, 1935). Praise for the Nazis' sterilization law was further popularized by the journalist Fred Hogue, an 'enthusiast of the American Eugenics Society', who wrote a regular column on 'social eugenics' for the Sunday edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, where he 'frequently cited the publications of the Human Betterment Foundation'. In 1936 he praised the German sterilization programme 'for the elimination of the reproduction of the unfit' (Hogue, 1936; Stern, 2005: 82).

Even after the introduction of the Nuremberg laws in 1935, when sterilization and racial policies could hardly be defended any longer as 'neutral' measures that were independent of the Nazis' anti-Semitism, *Eugenical News* stayed loyal to Nazi Germany. Clarence G. Campbell, the president of the Eugenics Research Association, deemed it 'unfortunate' that anti-Nazi propaganda had 'gone so far to obscure the correct understanding and the great importance of the German racial policy'. No 'earnest eugenicists', Campbell claimed, could fail 'to give approbation to such a national policy'. In addition to the sterilization law and its implementation, he commended the youth movement and the labour service as eugenic measures and concluded: 'Thus we have the encouraging example before us of a nation that is intelligent enough to see that its first necessity is the biological one of improving its racial quality' (Campbell, 1936; Tucker, 2002: 46–7; Ordover, 2003: 40–4). Harry L. Laughlin also continued actively to support Nazi Germany's eugenics programme after 1935. In 1937 he organized the production of an American version of the Nazi propaganda film *Erbkrank*, with subsidies from the 'Pioneer Fund' which had recently been established thanks to substantial donations by the textile magnate Wickliffe Draper. Laughlin, who became the first president of the 'Pioneer Fund', offered the film under the title 'Applied Eugenics in Present-Day Germany' free of charge to 3,000 American high schools, but only 28 schools accepted the offer (ibid.: 45–6). Laughlin's tireless promotion of German eugenics in the USA did not remain unrecognized in Germany: in 1936 the University of Heidelberg, on the occasion of its 550th anniversary, awarded him an honorary doctorate for his efforts in promoting German science abroad (ibid.: 48–9).

Already in 1934, a German exhibition based on the collection of the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden had been brought to the USA where it enjoyed greater success than the propaganda film *Erbkrank*. The exhibition had been conceived in 1930 when members of the American Public Health Association (APHA) had visited the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden. In 1934, subsidized by the German Ministry of the Interior and the Oberlaender Trust, a charity that funded research that promoted German–American academic exchanges, an American version went on display in California and Oregon. In 1933–4, the APHA sent its assistant secretary, William W. Peter, for 6 months to Germany to prepare the exhibition; its curator, Bruno Gebhard of the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden, accompanied the exhibition to California in 1934 where it was opened on the occasion of a meeting of the Human Betterment Foundation in Pasadena. From 1934 to 1935 it was on tour in Los Angeles, Stockton, Sacramento, Salem/Oregon and Portland and was seen by thousands of visitors. The exhibition was then donated to the Museum of Science in Buffalo, New York, where it was put on permanent display in the 'Heredity Hall'

(Rydell *et al.*, 2006; Gebhard, 1976: 68–70, 79–81; Peter, 1934a, 1934b; Kühl, 1994: 54–5).

Not all American commentators on the German sterilization law were as enthusiastic as Laughlin, Campbell, or Popenoe, but even more moderate eugenicists praised the law for being based on sound scientific and legal foundations. The law seemed to prove that eugenics had nothing to do with the anti-Semitism of the Nazis, but was based on the findings of scientific research (Kühl, 1994: 51). Leon F. Whitney, general secretary of the American Eugenics Society, was more reserved than Laughlin since he favoured voluntary over enforced sterilization. Still, he could not hide his admiration of the Nazi sterilization law: 'Many far-sighted men and women in both Britain and America have long been working earnestly toward something very like what Hitler has now made compulsory' (Whitney, 1934: 7; Kühl, 1994: 35–6).

The Nazis in turn appreciated the support for their sterilization laws they received from the USA and used it to justify their programme of racial hygiene. Walter Gross of the Racial-Political Office of the NSDAP referred to American examples and role models such as the sterilization laws in order to defend Nazi policies against criticism from abroad (Koonz, 2003: 123–4). The influential position that German academics had acquired within the IFEU since the late 1920s was now instrumentalized by the Nazi government and used to advertise its policies before international audiences. At the first meeting of the IFEU after the Nazi takeover, held in Zurich in 1934, the German delegation under Ernst Rüdin managed to pass a resolution that supported Nazi racial policies and gave it 'a blank cheque'. A major success for such Nazi propaganda was the organization of the world congress of the International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems (IUSIPP), which was held in Berlin in 1935. Eugen Fischer served as president of the congress, and used it as a forum to praise Adolf Hitler in front of the 500 participants. The Führer, Fischer claimed, had 'clearly understood the deep and important meaning of population policies'. The members of the IFEU who were present, Laughlin and Campbell among them, agreed. For the Nazis the conference was a great success, but the obvious instrumentalization of science for Nazi propaganda proved counterproductive in the long run, for it encouraged the open criticism of eugenics and increased the plausibility of critics' arguments (Kühl, 2013: 99–100).

Confronted with the closed ranks of radical eugenicists and racial hygienists who were sponsored and used by the National Socialists, systematic scientific criticism of the Nazis' programme of racial hygiene depended on the initiative of individual scholars. The most active critic of Nazi science in America was the anthropologist Franz Boas of New York's Columbia University, who had emigrated from Germany in the late 19th century. The 'founding father' of cultural anthropology and both a prolific author and an inspiring academic teacher, Boas had criticized the orthodoxy of physical anthropology since before the First World War. From 1933 onwards, he tirelessly argued against the political instrumentalization of 'racial studies' in Nazi Germany. Until 1938, however, he tried in vain to form an anti-racist alliance against Nazi science and its German and international adherents. Only after the introduction of the Nuremberg laws and the pogroms of 9–10 November 1938 did American academic organizations, such as the American Anthropological Association and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, protest in public against the racial policies of Nazi Germany. The most

famous document, the so-called 'Geneticists' Manifesto', passed by socialist eugenicists on the occasion of the international geneticists' congress in Edinburgh in 1939, did not criticize eugenics and the study of human heredity as such, but rather its instrumentalization by the Nazis (Kühl, 2013: 146–7; Barkan, 1992: 279–340; Weigner, 1935; Huxley and Haddon, 1935).

Boas' criticism of scientific racism was directed at the Nazis' racial studies in Germany, but also served a purpose in the American debate between the adherents of scientific racism, which was still dominant among scientists, and his own version of cultural anthropology, a main influence on the fledgling social sciences. The definition of race that Boas and his students such as Otto Klineberg, Ashley Montagu and Ruth Benedict advanced in the 1930s, and which was adopted by the UNESCO statement on race after the Second World War, was not universally accepted. While the Boas school's views were increasingly accepted by anthropologists and psychologists, not least because the assumptions of American test psychology could not be confirmed (Garth, 1931; Richards, 1997; Gould, 1981), American medical scientists, biologists and geneticists were much less prepared to abandon the principles of scientific racism. With the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, the tenets of the Boas school gained weight, since American admirers of German race hygiene could no longer refer to the legal and 'objective character' of eugenic measures in Nazi Germany and deny the link between eugenics, racism and anti-Semitism (Essner, 2002). The radicalization of racial policies in Nazi Germany from the mid-1930s provided the key argument for critics of any kind of scientific racism and contributed significantly to its retreat in the USA (and the UK), which continued rapidly after the Second World War and culminated in the UNESCO statements on race (Kaufmann, 2003; Stocking, Jr, 1996; Boas, 1940). Even though some American hardliners such as Lothrop Stoddard stuck to their positive view of German racial hygiene, the war finally brought the symbiosis between German and American eugenicists to an end (Stoddard, 1940: 190; Kühl, 1994: 53). Indicative of the development of eugenics is the fate of the exhibition on 'Eugenics in the New Germany', which had been on display in Buffalo, NY, since 1936. After the USA entered the war in 1941, the exhibition on Nazi Germany's programme of racial hygiene became an embarrassment and was quietly removed from the museum in 1943 and then destroyed (Rydell *et al.*, 2006: 361).

Still, eugenics in the USA was not immediately abandoned after the war, but transformed and 'repackaged': to mainline eugenicists in Germany and the USA, the substance of eugenics was not discredited because of the experience of German racial and genocidal policies. Paul Popenoe, for instance, remained committed to the goal of the eugenics movement, but now avoided the very term 'eugenics'. Instead of compulsory sterilization, he concentrated on positive eugenic measures and devoted his postwar career almost completely to family and marriage counselling in an effort to encourage people of 'superior stock' to procreate. Eugenic sterilizations in California were continued on the same level as before the Second World War until 1953; the state's sterilization law was only fully and finally repealed in 1979 (Stern, 2005: 84, 118).

After 1945, it was the German eugenicists' turn to point to the support they had received from American eugenicists. At the Nuremberg Trials, Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal physician who been in charge of the Nazi euthanasia programme, included

Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) in his defence papers and referred to American support for Nazi racial hygiene. In an effort to defend his prominent role during the Third Reich, he presented America as the original 'home' of eugenics; he also linked eugenics with the Nazis' euthanasia programme and genocide (Weindling, 2004: 229). Ironically, this defence strategy strengthened the association of eugenics with Nazi racial policies and further damaged its public image. In this context, the American champions of mainline eugenics were losing the battle and were moved to the fringes of academia, or at least forced to drop their openly racist agenda and change their terminology: instead of eugenics and sterilization, they now supported 'genetics' and 'family planning'. Not least because of its 'Nazi connection', eugenics became a taboo topic, whose erstwhile popularity was rarely mentioned in postwar America until its rediscovery by critical historians of the eugenics movement (Kevles, 1995; Kühl, 2013; Black, 2003).

International networking between eugenicists was normal practice before the Second World War; the cooperation between American and German eugenicists well into the 1930s was part of the established working relationship between the two countries within the international eugenics movement and its organizations. This institutional setting enabled the quick and seamless circulation of ideas central to the eugenics project: the main eugenic ideas were developed, transformed and stabilized in the complex transnational setting of the eugenics movement, which explains similarities in nations with very different political systems and traditions. The cooperation between German race-hygienists and American eugenicists conformed to and stabilized the logic of modern science, which depends on transnational transparency, and a potentially unlimited exchange of knowledge and data. Until the Second World War, the eugenics movement thus kept Nazi Germany connected to international structures and provided it with a platform for the dissemination of propaganda for the regime. For the American 'mainline' eugenicists, increasingly criticized for their white supremacist ideas, admiration of the apparently successful eugenic policies in Nazi Germany seemed to provide much-needed support for their social-political 'project'. Ultimately, their admiration of the German programme of race hygiene proved to be counterproductive, since it strengthened the position of their opponents who could easily equate the Nazis' 'Racial State' with any form of eugenics. The criticism of the instrumentalization and perversion of science in Nazi Germany put American eugenicists in a defensive position, devalued their arguments and strengthened their critics, even though the path from enforced sterilization to genocide during the Third Reich was not straightforward. Still, transnational exchanges between American and German eugenicists constitute a central element of the history of eugenics throughout the 20th century: they did not only help the success of the eugenics movement in the first half of the 20th century, but also contributed significantly to the 'retreat of scientific racism' after the Second World War.

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1. Allen *et al.* (2005: 260) conclude that ‘there was nothing intrinsically unique in the history of German eugenics prior to 1933’, but ‘somehow sense that there *was* something different about the course the study of human heredity took under the swastika’. The difference, they claim, is to be found in the political system of the Third Reich.
2. Weiss (2010: 282–3) acknowledges the uniqueness of the American–German connection, but stresses the overall failure of American supporters of Nazi racial hygiene.
3. An exception is Rice (1929), a popular textbook on eugenics. Under the Nazis, Ploetz’s term ‘race hygiene’ was favoured over the more neutral ‘eugenics’ which was dropped because of its progressive and socialist connotations.

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